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Book Reviews

Douglas J. Besharov and Karen Baehler (eds.) (2013), *Chinese Social Policy in a Time of Transition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. £69.95, pp. 301, hbk
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This collection of fourteen chapters, including an introduction by the editors, is the result of a conference at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in 2009, and brings together a wide range of researchers on Chinese social policy from across the globe. It is noted in the introduction that a second volume, focusing on pensions and aging, is forthcoming as a result of the same conference. The topics covered include pensions and aging, health care, education, welfare, employment, housing, disabilities and poverty. The contributions come from a wide range of disciplines, and they all reflect on Chinese social policy during the transition unleashed by the twin policies of reform and opening.

The key strength of the text is its range. The book makes a valiant effort to cover many different policy areas related to social protection and policy in China. It is difficult to imagine that a scholar working in this area would not be able to find something of interest. The introduction and London's contribution deal with social policy in transition and welfare regimes respectively, and are then followed by contributions that are more policy specific. A second strength is that no single disciplinary approach dominates. The authors use different methodologies and approaches to social policy in China, including a number of comparative studies, to reflect on where Chinese social policy has come from, where it currently is and where it might be going in the future. These points mean the book should appeal to a broad audience interested in Chinese social policy and beyond.

However, the strengths of the book are also its weaknesses, and reflect a more general danger with edited volumes. The book covers too much in too many different ways without ever achieving a sense of coherence. It reads as if thirteen papers were put together and revised without enough consideration about how they interact with each other, and whilst the main theme, social policy in transition, is clear and consistent this is where any sense of the book as a collection ends. This is disappointing and, given the book is the result of the coming together of such a wide range of experts in the area, something of a missed opportunity.

Two things could have been done to remedy this issue. First, in their introductory chapter the editors could have moved away from a simple rundown of the contributions, and instead provided a more developed discussion of the common themes in the text. This does occur briefly towards the end of the introduction, where the editors highlight four overarching themes, but the discussion is underdeveloped, far too brief, and could have been taken much further. Developing these themes would have lent the text the coherence it currently lacks. It might also have helped organise the subsequent chapters, enabling the editors to group them by the theme they most relate to. Second, the contributors write in isolation, which given the common themes highlighted by the editors, the origins of the collection, and their publication together, is striking and, as noted above, a missed opportunity. The book would have been strengthened greatly by the contributors presenting their chapters as part of a wider text rather

than in isolation from each other. This extends to context setting for each chapter, which could have been reduced as, in some instances, the same points about China's transformation, development and so on are repeated.

A final point is the lack of a synthetic concluding chapter. Such an addition would fill the gaps in the introduction and provide the space for one of, or both, the editors to really delve into the themes and broader implications they see in the collection. As it stands, the book finishes with an engaging, but already published, contribution on HIV/AIDS and policy learning, which I enjoyed reading immensely but it did not satisfy as an end to the text.

In spite of these criticisms, the volume is a valuable and engaging contribution to our understanding of the social policy implications of China's transition. The collection reflects the range of research on social policy in China and, as the editors' note, the significance of the Chinese experience in managing social policy in transition. It would be of interest to both specialists and those with a general interest in China. The wide range of the chapters means that researchers are sure to find something valuable in the text, both in terms of details on particular policies but also methodologically. For general readers on China, the book may be a little too specialised, but the authors do a good job of introducing their particular areas of interest so it will reward those who persist. The volume will be a useful library addition at any institution where social policy, comparative social policy and China are taught because of its strengths.

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Ive Marx and Kenneth Nelson (eds.) (2013), *Minimum Income Protection in Flux*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. £55, pp. 335, hbk
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This book, edited by Ive Marx and Kenneth Nelson, combines in eleven chapters, written by nineteen authors, different perspectives on the current state and development of the minimum income protection systems in Europe and other countries. Unlike many other books, this one comes without a subtitle. The title *Minimum Income Protection in Flux* describes it well enough, but if a reader was forced to provide a subtitle there would be different options. A first and most simple choice would be: 'Research from the EQUALSOC network (and subsequent initiatives)' which would put a part of the acknowledgements on the cover.

A second, probably better choice for a subtitle would be: 'Empirical evidence from forty-five countries (1960–2009)'. This subtitle certainly promises a bit too much as not all of the book's chapters provide such a wide empirical perspective. But, taking all chapters together, this is what the book covers, which makes it an excellent read for everybody who's interested in detailed results and discussions of minimum income protection schemes in a large set of countries over a long period of time. This subtitle would also stress what is not the main focus of the book. It is strong in depicting minimum income protection systems from a wider social policy perspective but is not primarily interested in offering explanations for the differences between systems and changes over time. All chapters are inherently comparative, and, although they do not share a common sample of countries, the chapters fit quite well into an overall picture. Some chapters focus on EU countries only, others also include the US. In particular, the chapter by Jonathan Bradshaw, Emese Mayhew and Gordon Alexander on minimum social